

# The Feat of Tabernacles' Abiding Significance

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn then in our Bibles to Leviticus 22, Leviticus 23 rather, and look together at verses 33 through to 44.

We're thinking here about the Feast of Tabernacles and its abiding significance. Some of you were involved in our recent festival outreach to the Jewish folks, and you'll know that the Festival of Tabernacles in the Jewish calendar has just finished a week ago or so.

But I want us to think about the Feast of Tabernacles and its abiding significance. It's important, I think, to realize that the festivals and so much of what we find in the Old Testament scriptures, all this has abiding significance.

It's not all finished and done with, and there's nothing more to say to us. And the Feast of Tabernacles has abiding significance, both as we look back and as to its present significance, and as to its future significance as well.

And, of course, as we were reading, it has to do with the way God made the people dwell in booths or tabernacles. So, I want to, by way of introduction, just to think about something that's taught to us here.

[ 1 : 37 ] And to begin with a saying that we, I think, all know, it is said, an Englishman's home is his castle. And that usually means that it is a place where he feels secure.

Maybe that's not the way it is nowadays, but that was the meaning, more or less, of the saying.

And, of course, towards the end of the 20th century, it was very much the end thing politically.

We better not mention her name. But it was the end thing that people should have the right to their own homes. And, indeed, that was promoted politically.

The popular view is that they ought to have their own homes. And the notion was in that, among other things, the security of having their own home.

But one thing that tabernacles shows us is that we have no real security apart from the security we have in God himself.

[ 2 : 41 ] And tabernacles showed that to the people of Israel. And that was the recurring theme of the festival of tabernacles.

He made them dwell in booths. In these very flimsy little dwellings. And so the emphasis was on God providing for them in the desert.

And God protecting them in the desert. Even although they were to make these flimsy little booths on the 15th day of the 7th month of their calendar.

And they were to sit in these and so on during the festival. There was, of course, too, as things moved on from the desert into the promised land.

And there was a bit of a development of the festival, as we shall see. But there again, the emphasis was on God's provision for them and God securing them.

[ 3 : 49 ] Now, if you were listening to the reading carefully, you will have noticed there was another angle on the festival of tabernacles. And that was, it was to be also a festival of in-gathering.

A festival that looked forward to the end of the history of the world and the great in-gathering at last. So, tabernacles has got that look to the past.

It has a present significance and it has a future significance, too. And I want to think about that all in the context of Christ himself.

What it has to say, what tabernacles has to say to us about Christ. And the abiding significance of the festival in relation to Christ himself.

So, to begin with, we want to look at tabernacles, its past significance by way of provision.

[ 4 : 56 ] Past provision. And, obviously, we'll look to begin with at how it was in the desert and then how it was in Israel.

But in both cases, you've got this commemorative aspect. You see, in verse 41 of Leviticus 23, we read the words, You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year.

Now, notice this. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. In other words, there was perpetuity to it. It was something that was to be done year on year.

You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. So, when you look back to the history of tabernacles in Israel, you find that it is described as a lasting ordinance.

And it was to be celebrated throughout the generations. And the celebration, of course, was very much focused on making these little booths.

[ 6 : 09 ] Verse 42. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths. They were to live in these.

And they were to know that the Lord made his people to dwell in them in the desert those 40 years. It's not that they lived in the booths.

It's not that they lived in the booths all through the 40 years. They had very sophisticated tents to dwell in. But for seven days in the year, they were to make these rickety little dwelling places and sit in them.

And they were taught by this very simple, flimsy structure, open to the sky, that God was the provider of their every need.

God was their protector in the wilderness wandering. And that was important to them. They were to recognize both God's provision and God's protection.

[ 7 : 16 ] And you can imagine building one of these little booths in Glasgow, open to the sky. Chances of missing a good plump or rain would be pretty slim.

And there in the desert, although they had less rain, still there was that sense of the thing was open to the sky. They were really depending on God both to protect them and provide for them.

The other aspect of this is that the people were to rejoice in the Lord. It was a joyous festival. They were to rejoice in the Lord.

Because of the Lord's provision for them and protection of them. The Lord, as it were, spread his presence over them.

There's an interesting play on the word tabernacle. The original Hebrew is sukkah. Plural sukkot. And the sukkah was a word that was used for God's presence among his people and over his people in the wilderness wanderings.

[ 8 : 33 ] We sing in Psalm 90, Lord, Moses' song by the way. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in generations all. You didn't know it, I suspect.

But that word, dwelling place, is sukkah. It's a booth, a tabernacle. You have been our tabernacle. You yourself.

You yourself. You've spread your presence over us. You've looked after us. You've provided for us and protected us.

And Moses' song tells us that. So there was this notion of God, in effect, spreading his tabernacle over his people. In those wilderness years.

And they were to rejoice and be glad about that. But then, looking back to past provision, we think about them briefly at tabernacles in Israel.

[ 9 : 34 ] Because the reference that we're looking at here and other references in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy shows that there was much more to the festival brought in once they settled in the land.

And it's certainly overlooked by most Christians that there are more sacrifices recorded in the Old Testament offered at tabernacles than any other of the festivals.

There's a huge number of sacrifices were offered at tabernacles. If you go, for example, to Numbers 29, from verse 36 following, there's a huge number of sacrifices were offered at tabernacles.

Now, let me draw your attention to this. That was true even after Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur was the Day of Atonement.

And Yom Kippur signified that God accepted outwardly at least, they were outwardly ceremonially clean, fit for purpose, for being his people.

[ 10 : 54 ] And yet tabernacles comes just a few days after Yom Kippur, the sacred day of their calendar. And instead of less sacrifices being offered, more sacrifices were offered.

Why? If the job had been done at the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, why all these extra sacrifices at tabernacles?

Have a look at it. Read it in Numbers 29 from verse 36. And what you see this shows us is that the need for a sacrifice, to finish all these sacrifices was still there.

A sacrifice that would end the unease of conscience, had not yet come. And the joy was to be about God's provision and God's protection.

There was a yet-to-be-ness about it. They had to wait for it. And when they got into the land and they had to offer all these sacrifices, even at tabernacles, it kept before them.

[12:13] The best was yet to come. And so, they were joyful, yes. Joyful in anticipation that the God who had protected them and provided for them in the desert was doing this in the land and that the day would come when he would fulfill all these sacrifices they had to offer.

So, we find them waiting for something better. Actually, we aside for a moment, the festival of tabernacles was not celebrated in Israel for centuries because of the sin of the people.

The very note of celebration was absent because they turned from the Lord to the gods of the nations. And what we can do with this, and I think we need to do with this, is to look back and recognize the things that God was saying to his people then.

And it helps us to look at the fact that he did protect them, that he did provide for them, that he kept them as an entity all down through the centuries.

You've heard the saying of the wise man who said to the skeptical king when he was asking, how can we prove that God exists, that the living God exists?

[13:56] And his answer was, his answer was, the Jews, your majesty. He formed them.

In Egypt he brought them out. He preserved them. He protected them. He provided for them. He brought them into the land. He kept them in there for as long as he would.

And then he carried them out of it. And that same God brought them back to it. He helped them. But then I want to think about the second thing, and that is tabernacles, present blessing from God.

Past provision, present blessing. And the first thing I want to do is to look at the negative side of this, tabernacles as it is in Judaism.

Now, the official rejection of Jesus by the Jewish authorities was a rejection of the belief that he was the Messiah, but also that his death was a sacrificial offering, that it was the true atonement.

[15:12] But when in time the sacrifices were removed, Judaism had to move as well.

Judaism had to modify itself. They had to get something in there to replace the sacrifices. And repentance and prayer and so on were the ways that he tried to plug the gap, if you like.

They shifted. They modified to survive. And they modified the festivals, all of them, and they modified tabernacles too.

And they made tabernacles, we were thinking about this just the other week, they made the festival of tabernacles tie in with the whole system of synagogue readings.

It was the point at which they ended the synagogue readings and started again, back to the beginning, if you like. And there were many things they did, and still do to this day, that focus away from the need of sacrifice.

[16:30] For example, we read in this passage that they were to, verse 40, Luke, and you shall take for yourselves on the first day fruit of the beautiful trees.

And that's usually an etrog, a citron, it's a sort of lemon-like fruit. And they were to take one of these and they were to make what we call a lulav, and they were to bind a pan frond and a willow branch, a small branch, and a myrtle branch.

They were to bind them together and they were to wave these before the Lord. And Jews still do that to this day. They spend a great amount of time getting the perfect etrog, the perfect fruit, that it's symmetrical and all that.

And they major on getting a good lulav made of these branches I've talked about. And they shift the focus. For example, here's a prayer that comes from the synagogue service.

May it be thy will, O Lord my God, and God of my fathers, that your presence be with us. Listen to this. Spread over us the sukkah, the tabernacle, of your peace in the merit, notice this, in the merit of the commandment we are now fulfilling.

[18:03] In other words, give us your blessing on account of what we are doing. See how they worked it? They moved away from the need of a sacrifice to end all sacrifices, to give the true forgiveness of sins.

They moved away from that to God reward us for the things we do religiously. And I remember reading in a book on tabernacles, Jonathan Sachs, the chief rabbi.

You'll have heard him on the television, I'm sure. And he said about tabernacles, if only we spent more time looking carefully at our hearts than looking at the etrog, that's the fruit, trying to get the perfect fruit and the perfect lulav made of the branches.

In other words, we're looking at the outward things and not the heart. And that was a very perceptive remark by the chief rabbi. They shifted the focus.

Sadly, he's not in focus either when it comes to atonement through the blood of the cross. But you see the point. That is a negative and there's no blessing in that.

[ 19 : 26 ] That's the bottom line. Tabernacles, present blessing. There's no blessing in Judaism whatever superficially they may say.

It's easy to whip yourself up to be joyful in the Lord and not have any real ground for doing that. The ground for rejoicing in the Lord must be the ground the Lord has placed there.

Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone. In dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health the Lord's right hand does valiantly.

We must have a foundation that is approved by God himself in order for us to truly rejoice and be glad in him.

And therefore, when we come to the Christian viewpoint on enjoying what I might call the partial fulfillment of tabernacles, the first thing we think about is the coming of the Son of God.

[ 20 : 45 ] The Word was made flesh and set up his tabernacle among us. 1 John, not 1 John, chapter 1 of John's Gospel verse 14.

The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. And the picture is of him setting, pitching his tent. And in his coming he came to fulfill those sacrifices and make an end of them in himself.

And he assures us as he did his disciples that having finished that work it was an advantage for him to pick up his tent and go home to glory.

I tell you it is an advantage that I go away for if I go the Spirit will come whom I will send in the Father's name. He shall glorify me.

And the Pentecostal outpouring after his ascension and the ministry of the Spirit at that Pentecost marked a new beginning.

[ 22 : 04 ] A great outpouring. It marked a fuller expression of the truth. The tabernacle of God is with men and he shall dwell with them.

He'll pitch his tent in a permanent way. And we have that in a sense a partial fulfillment of the meaning of tabernacles.

And the other side of that is that as well as that there is a mighty in gathering in process. There is the harvesting of the world.

Remember I said that another aspect to tabernacles from the time they dwelt in the land was the in gathering. And tabernacles looks forward.

There is a partial fulfillment of it in that the gathering is going on. The world is being made aware of the Lord Jesus Christ and people are turning to him.

[ 23 : 14 ] I forget how many tens of thousands the Christian statisticians tell us but tens of thousands of people become Christians from all over the world every week of the year.

The in gathering is going on and if we could only see it we are part of the package of blessing to the world.

the prayers we pray in Jesus name for the coming of his kingdom it is all part of the in gathering. There is a partial fulfillment there.

We live in exciting times at that level. We are living in the days of world evangelism and we mustn't let the harsh reality of the decline of Christianity in the UK and in Scotland we mustn't let that dull our spirits or bleed our vision.

The in gathering aspect of tabernacles is having its fulfillment. If it's to do anything for us it's to make us pray all the more that he'll not pass us by here.

[ 24 : 35 ] That he'll work and in gathering among us locally and nationally. so there are things we can rejoice about when we think about tabernacles now and the present blessing as we think more about the meaning significance the abiding significance of tabernacles.

But our time is whizzing on so let's finish with the third thing tabernacles the future glory. Because there is that side to tabernacles there is a yet to be side of it.

There is a climactic fulfillment which we need to acknowledge. Go to for example we could have read in Zechariah 14 and look there we could read in John John's revelation chapter 7 from verse 9 where he beholds that great multitude gathered from all the nations the kindreds tribes peoples and tens and what are they doing?

They're standing before the Lord with what? With palm branches in their hands. They're waving them with joy. It is the great in gathering completed.

it's the yet to be. It's the future glory. There will come a point in time at which the sum total of Christ's own will be gathered in from this world and he will return and not only will judgment be carried out but the time for the Lord's people to rejoice and be glad to fulfill that aspect of tabernacles in a way that's never been done yet it'll come.

[ 26 : 46 ] They'll enter into their inheritance. Then says Jesus the meek shall inherit the earth. Then John's vision in Revelation 7 from verse 9 will be fulfilled and the Lord's people will be filled with wonder love and praise as they gaze upon the Savior the word who in time set up his tent in this world to do the work he was given to do then we'll see him in a light that we've never seen him before then the words of John's revelation there in chapter 7 from verse 15 will begin to make sense to us then we'll know what it is for the lamb in the midst of the throne to lead his people and feed them and we'll begin to see the climactic fulfillment of tabernacles

Isaiah 35 verses 8 to 10 will make sense to us and the complexities of Zechariah 14 will be unraveled and so as we think about tabernacles of future glory we're to lift up our heads afresh with glad anticipation for our salvation is nearer than when we first believed there will be a completion a climactic fulfillment of tabernacles and my dear friends we are to recognize that this is something to look forward to in Jesus because the time will come when we will see him as he is and the fulfillment of the words the tabernacle of

God is with men and he shall dwell with them forever and ever and they with him shall be embarked upon we can learn looking back we can learn about the present blessing and the way to it and we can learn about the future glory of tabernacles Amen